Re-Orienting Whiteness
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CHAPTER 2

Whiteness and “the Imperial Turn”

Angela Woollacott

The study of whiteness as a racial category emerged roughly at the same time as historians became interested in postcolonial theory and subaltern studies, and forged what became known as “the new imperial history.” Yet the two areas had different scholarly roots. Whiteness studies grew from labor history, sociology, cultural studies, and feminist theory, among other fields. Here I consider some connections between whiteness studies and the new imperial history as they have evolved, and a few of their implications for each other. Recent work has emphasized the global circulation of racial thinking, and historians of empire have located whiteness as a racial category in diverse colonial sites. Arguably, since the seventeenth century, if not before, the white settler colonies have been key sites. Relevant questions, I think, include: How has white settler colonialism been the breeding ground of specific forms of whiteness? How has the whiteness created by white settler colonialism been connected to the whiteness constructed by slavery and post-slavery societies—or that of societies shaped by both slavery and settler colonialism? How has Australian history, in particular, contributed to broader understanding of changing historical constructions of whiteness? And how might analyses of whiteness contribute to future work in Australian history? All of which, arguably, begs the question: How can we analyze and subvert whiteness without reifying it—through seemingly inescapable shorthand of speaking of white people? Perhaps we should speak of “whitened” people?

I begin with a few notes on the emergence of whiteness studies, before similarly considering the appearance of “the imperial turn,” and then moving on to the category of “settler colonialism.” I will then offer a few thoughts on how Australian history has contributed to broader understandings of historical constructions of whiteness, and conclude with a bit of speculation about how
analyses of whiteness, including work on other settler colonies, might help to shape our understanding of the nineteenth century in Australia.

The Emergence of Whiteness Studies

One of the first and most influential historians to study whiteness was the American labor historian David Roediger. Roediger’s insightful work on whiteness, the first book of which was published in 1991, has been founded on his passionate commitment to radical politics and activism, specifically to the possibility of workers uniting across racial barriers. Through detailed research into the labor movement in late-nineteenth-century America, Roediger argues that race and class were constructed together in a way that divided workers by privileging some workers through the category of whiteness. The social rewards of whiteness were sufficient to split the American working class and thus make it more tractable for employers, especially in the crucial decades following the Civil War and the abolition of slavery. In his close study of the 1877 General Strike in St Louis, for example, Roediger identified a moment of cross-racial protest that was quashed by a coalition of interests between the European-descended class of skilled workers, the local elite, and municipal authorities. In opting to close ranks with the local elite, skilled workers allowed racism to set limits on the potential for the labor movement to improve conditions for all workers.1 Roediger’s work was influential because of its detailed historical specificity and his appealing insistence that racism was not inevitable or immutable, but contingent and shifting.

It is germane to recall the crucial role of David Roediger’s work for American history as we grapple with our current role as historians within whiteness studies. In Australia the field of whiteness studies was boosted in 2003 with the launching of the Australian Critical Race and Whiteness Studies Association (ACRAWSA). This interdisciplinary association is linked to cultural studies, anthropology, sociology, and other fields. Internationally, whiteness studies has had such interdisciplinary roots. Ruth Frankenberg’s 1993 study White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness made clear how valuable a sociological approach could be for the United States. Frankenberg used detailed interviews with a small cohort of women to show variation in individual awareness of white racial privileges, as well as the operation of those privileges in specific demographic and cultural contexts.2

Sociological and contemporary cultural criticism have also played a significant role in analyzing specific factors in the construction of whiteness in Australia. Aileen Moreton-Robinson’s substantial contributions to the field have included one of the few edited volumes on the subject, as well as a powerful critique of racism within Australian feminism.3 Due to recent critical work, not only has the historical phenomenon of “White Australia” received renewed scrutiny, but the term “whitefella” has become newly resonant. Whitefella still does not have the currency and therefore the reflexive potency of the ubiquitous term “Pakeha” in Aotearoa/New Zealand, but it is gaining usage and served as the theme for a provocative look at late-twentieth-century Australian race relations.4 Disciplinary wellsprings for the study of whiteness have also included literary criticism and psychoanalytic theory, to plumb what, according to Jennifer Eureford, are the roles of fantasy and aggression in white Australian identity.5 Tanya Dalziell’s study of settler romance fiction and gender (particularly “the Australian girl”) in the late nineteenth century explores the way whiteness was shaped in adventure stories often set in the bush.6

In the United States, where the study of whiteness was first taken seriously, other historians quickly followed Roediger’s lead. The field soon boasted wonderful titles such as Noel Ignatiev’s How the Irish Became White (1995); Karen Brodkin’s How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says About Race in America (1999); Matthew Frye Jacobson’s Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race (1998), and so forth.7 Whiteness studies also spawned in other disciplines. From its first emergence, the study of whiteness was applied to literature (not least by Toni Morrison8), film, and other areas of cultural production. It encompassed critical legal theory, and soon boasted not only at least one reader in whiteness studies, but from 1992 a journal titled Race and Thought edited by Noel Ignatiev and John Garvey, with the motto “Our rights to whiteness is loyalty to humanity.”9

The first feminist works to reveal complicity between feminists, racism, and imperialism did not use the term “whiteness” per se, even though their work—such as Vron Ware’s influential 1992 study Beyond the Pale: White Women, Racism and History—raised crucial questions about what Antoinette Burton termed feminists’ peculiar Burdens of History, that is, the contemporary legacies of racism in first-wave feminist thought and activism.10 Louise Newman’s work has been very important in raising these questions about the American women’s rights movement of the late nineteenth century. Through a detailed analysis of American feminist thought from 1870 to 1920, Newman demonstrates the central role of racism and evolutionary thought in underpinning middle-class women’s claims to expanded public roles based on their supposed white cultural superiority and moral work as civilizing agents.11 It is a real boon to Australian historiography that Jane Carey has taken up these issues in relation to the Australian women’s movement, with her current research on eugenics, whiteness, and feminism in the early twentieth century.12

So, we might well ask, what is the role of history? If some commentators worried aloud that whiteness studies was a re-spin in the subject (just as some also worried much the same thing about the rise of masculinity studies and the universal male subject), for many historians around the world interested in race relations, identifying white as a constructed racial category was a productive step. As Richard Dyer contends, whiteness has been constituted through dominance: “The point of seeing the racing of whites is to dislodge them/us from the position of power, with all the inequities, oppression, privileges and sufferings in its train, dislodging them/us by undercutting the authority with which they/we speak and act in and on the world.”13 Historians
can, quite specifically, shed light on how whiteness has been constructed as a dominant and normative racial category, in specific times and cultural contexts, and therefore have a crucial role to play in whiteness studies.

"The Imperial Turn"

In Britain, the field of cultural studies was central to the rise of critical race theory, while many historians were far more conservative. Influenced by Marxism, Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Michel Foucault, and the subaltern studies group—such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s critiques of history, imperialism, and representation—from the 1980s cultural studies scholars developed a critical appraisal of colonialism in the modern period, its depredations in the colonies themselves, and its implication in knowledge production and the writing of history. This academic enterprise had clear contemporary political dimensions in Britain because of what Robert Young has termed "the demonstration of the relation of structures of colonialism to contemporary forms of imperialism, neocolonialism and racism."\(^{14}\) Crucial to the development of this field in Britain was the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, and the work in critical race theory by Stuart Hall and his student Paul Gilroy.\(^{15}\) It was no coincidence that one of the first British historians to use the term whiteness was Catherine Hall, Stuart Hall’s partner. In a 1992 essay, Catherine Hall referred to the varying meanings of whiteness as constructed by British missionaries in the West Indies in the 1830s and 1840s, such as one discursive rendering of it to mean "order, civilization, Christianity, separate spheres and domesticity, rationality, modernity and industry." Equating whiteness also with the behavior of British colonizers, Hall goes on to suggest that in the same moment it could also mean "when white Anglican clergymen and planters, some dressed up as women, joined forces to burn down chapels and mission stations and lynch, tar and feather missionaries themselves."\(^{16}\) Hall thus drew attention to the variability of whiteness, as well as the historical specificity of its meanings.

There has been a strong school of historical thought in Britain that resists postcolonialism, the critical study of Orientalism, whiteness studies, and the new imperial history—especially the notion that the empire shaped the metropole itself. Those who defend the idea of imperial impotence to sullying by the empire, and a conceptual division between the British Isles and the colonies have been accused of imperial nostalgia. Such defenders point to the popularity of Raj nostalgia (and thus by implication the memory of the empire) among the British public, and see the new imperial history as the work of "some revisionist historians, principally across the Atlantic."\(^{17}\) The eminent historian David Cannadine has specifically sought to counter the centrality of racial analysis in postcolonial histories by turning the discussion back toward class, the central category of analysis in older British social histories. Class, ritual, ceremony, and collaboration between local elites and British rulers constituted the main structure of the empire, according to Cannadine, in the book he titled *Ornamentalism* (2001) to signal its refutation of Said.\(^{18}\) Yet, against the weight of such resistance, there has been a growing school of British historians insisting on studying British imperialism around the globe and its ramifications. Arguably, slavery and its abolition have been foundational topics, through the work of historians such as James Walvin and Clare Midgley; too so has imperial propaganda and its presence in popular culture been a major theme, particularly in the work of John MacKenzie.\(^{19}\) It ought to be said, however, that there is still not a great deal of work on the historical construction of whiteness in Britain itself.

Over the last fifteen years, there has been an explosion of work on the empire, with the profusion of feminist and postcolonial approaches applied to British colonialism in South Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, and, more recently, the white settler dominions. Playing on the epithet "the linguistic turn" used to denote the arrival of poststructuralism and deconstruction on the shores of the historical discipline, Antoine Burton has defined the imperial turn in historical scholarship as: "accelerated attention to the impact of histories of imperialism on metropolitan societies in the wake of decolonization, pre- and post-1968 racial struggle and feminism in the last quarter century." Further, she contends that it has not been a turn toward empire so much as a critical return to the connections between metropole and colony, race and nation, which imperial apologists and dissenters have appreciated at least since the nineteenth century, if not before. In the context of Euro-American colonial histories, then, what we might properly call the return to empire is one symptom of the pressure of postcolonial social, political, and demographic realities on the production of modern knowledge.\(^{20}\)

Burton’s focus was on the impact of postcolonial approaches on the study of the European and other metropoles. Yet we can also perceive an "imperial turn" in historical work on the colonies themselves, and connections across imperial locations.

In relation to the history of the Antipodes, the phrase "the imperial turn" may at first glance seem nonsensical. A nonspecialist might imagine that Australian and New Zealand histories have always been necessarily contextualized through their location within the British Empire. Historians in these fields, of course, know that has not been the case. Increasingly, in fact, there has been a recent "return to empire" that has challenged the nationalist framework dominant in recent decades. Tony Ballantyne, in his study of the circulating and contingent ideology of Aryanism and connections between New Zealand and India in the nineteenth century, uses what he calls "the disruptive power of empire" and its "cross-cultural engagements." Thus he refutes historiographical adherence to national boundaries in favor of studying "the cultural and intellectual transformations enacted by colonialism both in the colonies and in Europe itself."\(^{21}\)
For Australian history, this development is especially significant because of a powerful nationalist historiographical paradigm, built on both radical nationalism and other variants. In the 1950s and 1960s, a left-leaning nationalist framework became ascendant in Australian historiography through influential works such as Vance Palmer’s *The Legend of the Nineties* (1954) and Russel Ward’s *The Australian Legend* (1958), followed by the somewhat different nationalist interpretations of Manning Clark. While there were variations within this paradigm, and political differences between the radical nationalists of the post–World War II period, and the New Left of the Vietnam War years, the nationalist framework became firmly entrenched in Australian historiography. Its entrenchment was linked to a rejection of both conservative, pro-imperial political views and an older historiography that considered Australia within its relationship to Britain. Federation became a major focus of historical scholarship, reflecting the emphasis on severing ties with Britain and the desire to see Australia only within its own shores. Significantly, the nationalist framework shaped the feminist and labor histories of the 1970s and 1980s, such that critical perspectives also stayed within national frames. Even the emergent field of Aboriginal history largely accepted the same boundaries. Historical research sought to consider Australian subjects on their own terms, rather than as broader global phenomena, and especially not as produced through the historical relationship with Britain—with the obvious exception of Australia’s convict origins, which was the subject of much work in this period.

The imperial turn has included new attention to the historical relationship between metropole and colonies, and metropole and dominion, but it has also meant raising new questions about race relations and colonialism within our shores. Becoming more aware of the empire, then, has returned our gaze not just outward but insistently inward, with new questions about the continuing structures of colonialism. For us, Ania Loomba’s warnings have had particular pertinence. Loomba has pointed out that the “post” in “postcolonialism” does not mean that colonialism has been supplanted, and that “it is premature to proclaim the demise of colonialism.” Rather, she says, we need to see postcolonialism as “the contestation of colonial domination and the legacies of colonialism.” Thus, in the Australian context, the new imperial history has broached the territory mapped out by the field of Aboriginal history since the 1970s. In so doing, it is much indebted to and has joined forces with historians of Indigenous people in their critical approach to the history of Australian race relations. At the same time, it has brought some slightly different or renewed emphases to the historical study of race in Australia. For example, while the term “settler” has been used in Aboriginal history since the 1970s, there is now a reinvigorated interest in the meanings and workings of white settler colonialism here.

The Category of “Settler Colonialism”

The very interesting recent collection on *Settler Colonialism in the Twentieth Century* (2005) edited by Caroline Elkins and Susan Pedersen suggests commonalities and differences among states that have not, to my knowledge, previously been compared. They look at Korea and Manchuria under the Japanese, the Jewish settlement of Palestine, Angola and Mozambique under the Portuguese, German settlers in occupied Poland, and the French in Algeria, South Africa, Kenya, and Rhodesia, all as case studies of twentieth-century settler colonialism. Elkins and Pedersen posit differences between these twentieth-century cases and what they term “new world states” such as America and Australia. The differences include that in the twentieth-century cases the settlers mostly did not become majority populations; and the metropole continued to wield more power, including military power. The book is very useful in its broadening of the category of settler colonialism beyond the white settler colonies of the European empires.

A basic question then is: Is white settler colonialism categorically different from other settler colonialisms? I think the answer must be no. Penny Edwards, in her work comparing anti-miscegenation policies and child removal in Western Australia, Burma, and Cambodia, argues against distinctions between crown colonies and settler colonies. Colonialism, its racial hierarchies and their intersections with other categories, and its regulatory and discursive regimes operated in ways directly comparable across such typologies.

Yet there are specificities to white settler colonial histories that offer us insights into the contingent construction of whiteness as the superordinate racial category. In white settler colonies, there have been specific regimes in which whiteness itself accrued legislative, regulatory, and cultural substance. This is where linking whiteness and settler colonialism can provide us with telling insights. Needless to say, although my focus is on the British Empire, Algeria and other non-British examples of white settler colonialism are in the same frame. And Katherine Ellinghaus’s work makes clear the value of comparing Australia and the United States in the modern period when the latter was no longer part of the British Empire. As the editors of this volume argue in their introduction, whiteness studies will benefit both from being “unwrapped” from its tethering to American labor and migration history, and at the same time locating its operations there as stemming from America’s settler-colonial origins.

While Elkins and Pedersen draw distinctions between what they call “new world settler states” and their twentieth-century case studies, it was largely in the twentieth century that whiteness was overtly enthroned and empowered. In South Africa, of course, the Apartheid regime from 1948 to 1994 articulated white racial privilege in a myriad of legal, economic, political, and social forms. The twentieth century also produced the full emergence of a legislatively entrenched White Australia, although, as Leigh Boucher argues in his essay in this section, the 1870s and 1880s were the formative imperial historical moment when “[p]olitical entitlement and competence…were explicitly designated as white.” There is much historical reason to suggest that we should look more closely at connections between South Africa and Australia. As Fiona Paisley has
argued, Australian history shows the complex relationship between colonialism, nationalism, and empire, such that

national history cannot be so directly read as signaling "separation" from empire. In the Australian case, post-federation nationalism emerged hand-in-hand with, and not in opposition to, empire. In fact loyalty to the British Empire increased in the first decades of nationhood as strengthened race ideology provided for both a White and an Imperial Australia.29

As Paisley suggests, contrary to what has been at least implicit in some nationalist histories, Australians' identification with the British Empire, and the concomitant articulation of whiteness, may in fact have been most overt and marked in the first half of the twentieth century. A new book by Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds locates Australia as one of several "white men's countries" that in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries together shaped a "global colour line."30

**Australian History and Historical Constructions of Whiteness**

Twelve years ago I sought to grapple with the historically specific construction of whiteness in the Australian colonies-dominion in my article on "Australian Women's Voyages 'Home' and the Articulation of Colonial Whiteness." One problem I sought to work through in writing that piece was the complexities of Australians' positioning in imperial hierarchies of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: their simultaneous status as colonials and colonizers. I suggested that: "Occupying an in-between ranking in imperial hierarchy, Australian women sought to elide the inferiority inherent in their colonialism by emphasizing their whiteness and their economic and cultural privileging." My focus was on the sea voyage Australian women and men took en route to England, and their status as white colonials in the imperial metropolis. It seemed to me that "while whiteness may have been so normative as to be partly invisible in Australia itself, exposure to different colonial racial structures [at the ports of call] at times compelled women to articulate notions of themselves as white that were integral to developing Australian national identity but usually tacit." My reading of women's records from the period—such as their accounts of their visits to Colombo, Bombay, Durban, and other ports—suggested that: "during the decades in which Australians established and first interpreted national Australian identity, the whiteness that was crucial to that identity was premised on a shared British heritage... on notions of England as 'home', and on belonging to the stratum of imperial rulers."31

My own focus is now turning to the articulation of whiteness and settler colonialism within Australia's shores, and I am excited by, and learning a great deal from, the work that has been done on that subject in recent years—as essays in this volume demonstrate. I am finding particularly useful and

stimulating the work that looks carefully at historically specific constructions of whiteness, racial power, and privilege in the settler-colonial context.

Leigh Boucher's work brings together careful archival research, a biographical approach, and discourse analysis. His analysis of settler-colonial men, their "othering" of Chinese and Indigenous subjects, and their construction of their own privilege and entitlements is a wonderful model of empirically grounded, specifically contextualized work on whiteness.32 Also, Penelope Edmonds's work on nineteenth-century expressions of Anglo-Saxonism raises very interesting questions about whiteness and settler colonialism.33 Through such detailed work, we are gradually accruing informed insights into the operation and evolution of settler colonialism here in Australia, and elsewhere.

A relevant question is: Can a study allow insight into whiteness without using the term? And I think the answer must be "yes." I have in mind two studies in particular. I have greatly enjoyed reading Julie Evans's book on Edward Eyre, race, and colonial governance. With detailed attention to the contexts of each stage of his career, and his own actions, as well as careful analysis of his writings, Evans mounts an argument that Eyre's ultimate repressiveness in Jamaica was the product of colonialism itself. Evans traces the evolution of Eyre's thinking and policies toward colonized peoples, and the ways in which he responded to the specific circumstances of each of his positions and the exigencies pertaining to the different colonies. This in turn builds her argument about his ultimately repressive policies being the systemic results of colonialism; that is, of the inextricable opposition of imperial interests and the rights and interests of colonized peoples. Without specifically addressing whiteness, she helps us to see the contingent operations of colonial rule that directly contributed to ideas of white racial superiority and authority.34 Like Penny Edwards's work, Evans's study cuts across typologies of colonies with its focus on historical specificity and organic interconnections.

Another book that speaks to whiteness studies, though it does not use exactly that term, is Victoria Haskins's *One Bright Spot* (2005). By telling the story of her great-grandmother as an employee of indentured Aboriginal domestic servants under the Aborigines Protection Board of New South Wales in the early twentieth century, Haskins presents us with a richly detailed story of individual women, their lives intertwined across racial and class boundaries. She shows in vivid detail how white women's social and racial positioning was created through this government-run system of exploitation, and discusses the complex politics surrounding the system at the time, as well as its historical legacies. These studies and a number of others have contributed recently to our understanding of white racial privileges, power, and identities in Australian history—and by extension to the history of settler colonialism and whiteness transnationally.

**Analyses of Whiteness and the Nineteenth Century in Australia**

The essays in this collection show that work on whiteness is providing new insights into Australian history, across a range of time periods and topics, as
well as other national and transnational histories. As historians, we know that racial categories including whiteness have been to a large extent historically contingent, and that we must look freshly at different periods. Scholars of whiteness in the early modern period are providing really intriguing and valuable lessons for those of us who are modernists about the quite different meanings attached to skin color at earlier moments. Roxanne Wheeler's study of racial understanding in eighteenth-century Britain reveals changing conceptions and uncertainty about racial categories. She argues that skin color, or complexion, was not the only determinant of racial status; rather, it was one determinant, but judgments also depended on a subject's status in relation to religion (Christianity being an important component of whiteness), education, and consumerism. Colonialism itself, Wheeler contends, became an important force in changing understandings of racial hierarchies.\footnote{In her essay in this section, Louise Newman shows how fluid ideas of whiteness were in the American colonies from the seventeenth century onward, how they varied by time and place, and how in fact the current racial category of "white" is the product of centuries of racial mixing.}\footnote{I am currently trying to educate myself about the mid-nineteenth century. For someone whose work has not much ventured earlier than the 1870s, this is a fascinating challenge. I find I am learning both from those who have focused on the Australian colonies, and those who have pursued connections and comparisons with other colonies—such as Julie Evans, and also Kirsten McKenzie in her evocative work on status, respectability, and class in New South Wales and the Cape Colony.}\footnote{As we seek to understand the construction of whiteness in Australia in the mid-nineteenth century, I suspect that work on other imperial locations—particularly, and perhaps only, other white settler colonies—will prove valuable. For example, in exploring how whiteness may have shaped social and legal hierarchies in the period following the end of convict transportation, that is, from the 1840s, Pamela Scully's work on the period of and after slave emancipation in the western Cape Colony may offer clues. In Australia, whiteness may well have been invoked to leverage the social status of emancipated convicts, as they struggled against material challenges and social prejudice. From Scully's work, we know that racial categories were reimagined after the emancipation of the enslaved in the 1830s, and as social and legal categories were rearticulated in conjunction with new patterns of labor and landholding. Conceptions of gender, respectability, and the family were all newly articulated to shore up a system of continuing racial hierarchy and oppression that needed new underpinnings to reflect the new legal realities. Scully shows powerfully how discourses of race and sexuality intertwined, such that, for women, "virtue" became synonymous with whiteness in a continuing subordination of black women.}\footnote{For the Australian context, similar questions could be applied to the effects of the ending of convict transportation on the linked categories of race, morality, and sexuality.}

Several scholars are conducting research that shows the significance of connections between, and the circulation of ideas around, the white settler colonies of the empire. In her study of the 1835–36 Select Committee on Aborigines, Elizabeth Elbourne argues that "debates about virtue were influenced by cross-cutting transnational discourses in the British world about religion, economics and gender, despite enormous variations in particular local contexts and in the local political implications of such discourses."\footnote{Considering New South Wales and the Cape Colony in one frame, Elbourne analyzes discussion of the virtue or otherwise of the British settler, and official plans to increase metropolitan oversight of settlers' treatment of Indigenous peoples. Such plans envisaged elevating the morals and behavior of white settlers at the same time as bringing Indigenous people into the fold of Christianity. Metropolitan perceptions of white settlers, at least, encompassed widely separated colonies within the same discursive frame.}\footnote{Alan Lester's work on the eastern Cape Colony in the nineteenth century emphasizes imperial connectedness. "British colonial discourses," Lester contends, "were made and remade, rather than simply transferred or imposed...between Britain and settler colonies like the Cape." Lester suggests that, just as the empire's material base consisted of an articulated world-wide trade in commodities, imperial production of knowledge also flowed between colonies and metropole and globally around the empire. "Settler newspapers and letters...official dispatches and travellers' reports," "parliamentary commissions, their "minutes of evidence" and reports, all circulated among the colonies, not least via the metropolitan and colonial presses. Lester finds these imperial networks illuminating for his study of the colonization of the Xhosa in the mid-nineteenth century because:}

During moments of imperial crisis in particular, colonial representations of the Xhosa were considered in the light of Australian settlers' images of the Aborigine, New Zealand colonists' constructions of the Maori, Indian officials' notions of the "Hindoo," West Indian planters' portraits of former slaves and not least, British bourgeois ideas of the labouring classes and other domestic "subaltern" groups.

This circulating compendium of racialized images, Lester contends, shaped metropolitan racial discourse and images as much as those of the colonies.\footnote{While Lester does not himself speak of whiteness, here, I think, we have important insight into the connections between settler colonialism and whiteness. A racial lexicon forged in multiple colonial sites, especially the confrontational and violent sites of settler colonialism, shaped British and hence Euro/American conceptions of racial hierarchy, even before the rise of so-called scientific racism. The violent struggles over land and for colonial control were narrated by the winners in multiple kinds of records that would become the colonial archive so influential in the later writing of histories. At the time of the creation of this circulating imperial discourse, the racial hierarchies it forged were crowned by the stratum of imperial rulers: the white settlers, colonial officials, and all who claimed British identity and status. Justifications for}
dispossession of Indigenous peoples, for colonial rule and violence, were articulated in specific ideas of white settler racial and cultural superiority.

The whiteness of settler colonialism has been forged in multiple and importantly diverse sites and times. Of course, it must not be seen as any monolith, or more significant than definitions of whiteness constructed in other sites. What it illustrates is the globally circulating nature of this toxic racial fiction, its plasticity, and its historical reach.

Gail B. Griffin has suggested that the work of scholars includes "the relentless destruction of innocence" about privilege and its workings in "oppressive discourses and institutions"—a destruction that meets "quite natural resistance to this ultimate loss of innocence." Exploring whiteness as a constructed racial category, and the specificities of its historical links to settler colonialism, can perhaps further the work of disrupting the "innocence" of racial hierarchies, their legacies, and the continuing effects of colonialism. In such a project, whiteness studies and postcolonial studies seem likely allies. The new imperial history, while perhaps not so new as it used to be, still holds much promise for exploring the historical workings of colonialism, and has potential to develop. It can continue to learn from whiteness studies, and in turn contribute substantially to it through providing grounded and contextualized analyses of the emergence and evolution of whiteness.

Notes


12. Jane Carey, chapter thirteen in this collection.


16. Catherine Hall, White, Male and Middle Class: Explorations in Feminism and History (New York: Routledge, 1992), 212.


20. Antoinette Burton, After the Imperial Turn: Thinking with and through the Nation (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 2; emphasis in the original.


26. See Katherine Ellinghaus, Taking Assimilation to Heart: Marriages of White Women and Indigenous Men in the United States and Australia, 1887–1937 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006); and chapter sixteen in this collection.

27. Jane Carey, Leigh Boucher, and Katherine Ellinghaus, chapter one in this collection.

28. Leigh Boucher, chapter four in this collection.

CHAPTER 3

The Strange Career of Whiteness: Miscegenation, Assimilation, Abdication

Louise Newman

The title of this chapter is taken from the title of a book written in 1955 by C. Vann Woodward, a renowned historian of race from the United States. Woodward's book, The Strange Career of Jim Crow, appeared just one year after the Supreme Court's famous ruling in Brown v. Board of Education (1954), which declared unconstitutional the principle of separate but equal that underlay segregation ever since the court's upholding of that principle in Plessy v. Ferguson (1896). Woodward, in tracing the history of racial segregation in the South, was especially taken with the various ironies in this history. Although most Americans—then and now—associated Jim Crow laws with the South, Woodward pointed out that it was a system that had first emerged in northern states in the antebellum period and was only infused into southern law several decades after the end of the Civil War (not immediately afterward as many believed). Woodward also took comfort in the fact that Jim Crow seemed to be an overlay onto southern culture, not something intrinsic to the region's history or deeply embedded in southern social custom. In other words, Woodward argued that Jim Crow as a social, political, and legal institution was of very recent vintage and from the vantage point of 1955, was vulnerable and under attack.1

Thus, in Woodward's view, Jim Crow in the South had had a very strange career indeed, with its seemingly abrupt emergence at the end of the nineteenth century and its equally sudden demise in the middle of the twentieth century. Of course, from today's perspective, the supposed challenge to the legal basis for Jim Crow that took place in 1954 may seem less significant to us than it appeared to Woodward's generation. Nonetheless, a major accomplishment of